



## **Administrative Office of the Courts**

100 Millcreek Park  
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601-9230  
p 502-573-2350 or 800-928-2350  
[www.kycourts.net](http://www.kycourts.net)

**Joseph E. Lambert**  
Chief Justice

**Melinda L. Wheeler**  
Director

Contact: Leigh Anne Hiatt, APR, public information officer  
502-573-2350, x 4064, cell 502-545-2839, [lhiatt@kycourts.net](mailto:lhiatt@kycourts.net)

*For Immediate Release*

### **South Middle School to be a pilot site for new Truancy Diversion Program created by the Kentucky Court of Justice**

FRANKFORT, Ky., April 5, 2006 — South Middle School in Henderson has been designated as a pilot site for the new Truancy Diversion Pilot Program, which will eventually be available statewide. The Kentucky Court of Justice has announced the creation of a Truancy Diversion Program for students at risk of being charged with a truancy offense and referred to District Court or Family Court.

"Truancy can be an early indicator of many negative social patterns that can develop later in a student's life," said Henderson County Family Court Judge Shelia N. Farris, who will help oversee the Truancy Diversion Pilot Program at South Middle School. "Our hope is that we can help students avoid these unwanted consequences if we can reduce their absenteeism in its early stages."

Students who have missed the number of days allotted for a school period or who have too many unexcused absences are subject to being charged with a truancy offense, which could create a formal court record. Truancy is a status offense, which means it is an act that would not be criminal if committed by an adult.

"We believe this important program for Kentucky's youth will really make a difference because it gets all parties involved: educators, law enforcement, the courts, the community and families," said Dane Ferguson, principal of South Middle School.

The program uses a team approach to help students develop good attendance habits and improve their overall educational experience. The team is comprised of judges, court designated workers, school counselors, principals, directors of pupil personnel and family resource staff.

The Court Designated Worker Program, under the direction of the Department of Juvenile Services of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), will oversee the Truancy Diversion Pilot Program. Court designated workers will hold weekly meetings with the parents and the student to review attendance records, behavior and grades, and to develop a plan for success.

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Local judges will periodically attend meetings to reinforce the work of the truancy diversion team, and to offer encouragement and recognition to participating students who are making progress.

The Kentucky General Assembly created the Court Designated Worker Program in 1986 through legislation that provided the services of a court designated worker for each of the 120 counties. Court designated workers process complaints against individuals under age 18, and provide redress for offenses without court action and without the creation of a formal court record. The CDW program is overseen by the AOC, which is the operational arm of the Kentucky Court of Justice and supports the activities of more than 3,400 court system employees, including the elected offices of justices, judges and circuit court clerks.

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